

Quail hunting rules adjusted at 7 DNR properties

The long-term decline of bobwhite quail populations has prompted the Department of Natural Resources to adjust the 2008 season dates, hunting hours and bag limits at seven state Fish and Wildlife areas (FWAs).

In northwest Indiana, quail hunting will be allowed at Jasper-Pulaski, Willow Slough and Winamac FWAs from Nov. 7 through Nov. 30, with a daily bag limit of two birds. Previously announced dates were Nov. 7 to Dec. 21, with a bag limit of five birds.

In southwest Indiana, the quail season dates at Glendale, Goose Pond, Minnehaha and Sugar Ridge FWAs will remain Nov. 7 through Jan. 15, but hunting hours at these sites will be restricted to 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST from Dec. 15 through Jan. 15. Also, the daily bag limit will be reduced from eight birds to four at Glendale, Minnehaha and Sugar Ridge. Goose Pond already has a four-bird limit.

"The concept here is to relieve some of the pressure on these small, isolated quail populations so we can provide a sustainable harvest," said Wayne Bivans, wildlife section chief for the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife. "The belief is this will allow the quail numbers to rebound quicker and be less susceptible to other factors like severe weather."

Harsh winter storms in the late 1970s took a brutal toll on Indiana's quail population, and a widespread lack of suitable habitat hampered the bird's ability to rebound. Even so, quail numbers in Indiana already were declining prior to 1978 for the same reason-lack of habitat.

Poor habitat does not appear to be the issue at DNR FWAs, yet hunter harvest of quail continues a steep downward slide. At Winamac, for instance, hunters bagged 208 quail in 1977 but about half that total a year later. By 1982 it dipped to 42 birds before climbing back above the 200 mark in 1987 and 1989. Since then, the annual harvest has been in gradual decline, bottoming out at 25 birds in 2007.

DNR biologists recently completed fall covey counts to establish current quail populations at state FWAs. The baseline data will be combined with future research in an ongoing process to determine if additional restrictions on season dates and bag limits will be necessary to reach sustainable harvest goals.

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